

Health Ministry Announced on Wednesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 125,716 With 197 More Iranians Killed By the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

Iran Foreign Ministry Spokesman Said on Wednesday That the Issue Of Solving the Problem of Stranded Iranians Along the Belarus-Lithuania Border Region Is on the Agenda of The Foreign Ministry

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Tehran Ready for Direct Talks With E3 In JCPOA Deal

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has officially announced its readiness for talks with the three European signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal in Tehran or in the trio's respective capitals, contrary to certain US media claims.

Speaking to Press TV, a source familiar with top Iranian nuclear negotiator Ali Baqeri Kani's diplomatic efforts in Brussels, Belgium, rejected the US media claims that Iran had responded negatively to a meeting with representatives of the European trio — France, Britain, and Germany.

According to the source, who was speaking on the condition of anonymity, Iran has formally voiced preparedness for direct talks with the three European parties to the nuclear deal, named the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Iran, the source added, invited the three states for visits to Tehran or offered trips to the trio's respective capitals for such talks, but it has received no response so far.

Baqeri-Kani is in Brussels to continue "talks on result-oriented negotiations" with the European Union's Deputy Secretary General Enrique Mora. **See Page 7**

Iranian Tanker Discharging Condensate In Venezuela

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An Iranian vessel is reported to be discharging 2.1 million barrels of condensate at a Venezuelan port under a swap deal between the two energy-rich nations struggling to cope with the inhuman U.S. sanctions.

Iran-flagged tanker Dorena, which arrived in Venezuelan waters on Monday, was expected to begin discharging its cargo on Wednesday, Reuters reported citing a document from the state-run PDVSA firm.

PDVSA agreed to a contract with the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) last month to exchange Iranian condensate for Venezuelan heavy crude, and the first Venezuelan cargo set said in September, according to the news agency.

Iran then supplied PDVSA with a first cargo of condensate on tanker Dino I, which sailed back last week carrying Venezuelan crude, it added.

U.S. sanctions have boosted cooperation between Tehran and Caracas, helping the two allies weather the impact of the draconian sanctions. **See Page 7**

Washington Blamed in Tehran Conference for Hardships of Afghans



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Senior Iranian officials have held the United States responsible for the hardships facing the Afghan people today, as Tehran hosts a meeting of Afghanistan's neighbors plus Russia aimed at coordinating efforts to restore peace and stability to the war-ravaged South Asian state.

On Wednesday, foreign ministers of Iran, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as the Russian and Chinese ambassadors attended the meeting of Afghanistan's six neighbors plus Russia — the second of its kind — at the Iranian Foreign Ministry in Tehran.

The foreign ministers of Russia and China also took part in the meeting online. Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said the summit would focus on the new situation in Afghanistan, expressing hope that it will send a common message with a united voice to the international community, regional countries and Afghanistan.

"We believe that in the first place, all neighbors and the international community, in parallel, should pay special attention to the political and humanitarian situation, along with the spread of terrorism, drug trafficking, and the situation of human rights and women in Afghanistan," he said.

Amir-Abdollahian also noted that the responsibility for the security of Afghan citizens and borders with neighbors lies primarily with the interim government in Kabul.

"Respect for other countries' sovereignty, preservation of their territorial integrity and non-interference in their affairs are among the basic principles of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy," he said.

"If a strong message is being sent today from the Tehran meeting for the formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan, it is because of attention to the history and the role of the Afghan people in countering the occupation and the challenges of recent decades."

Amir-Abdollahian blamed "foreign meddling" as the root cause of many of the problems currently facing Afghanistan and said the United States must openly accept responsibility "with a loud voice" for the catastrophes it brought about in the country during its two-decade-long invasion. **See Page 7**

Iran Hosting Afghan Refugees Amid U.S. Sanctions

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) Majid Takht Ravanchi has announced the country is hosting Afghans with "almost no new resources from the international community", while Tehran is under US sanctions.

Takht Ravanchi has urged the international community to assist Afghan people to stand with honor and dignity. "The international community has a moral responsibility to assist the Afghan people to stand on their own feet with honor and dignity," he stated in his op-ed published by local media.

The full text of the Iranian envoy's op-ed is as follows:

This Wednesday, the foreign ministers of Afghanistan's immediate neighbors plus Russia gather in Tehran to assess the current calamitous situation in that country. They meet to discuss the possible ways and means of assisting the people of Afghanistan in overcoming the difficult and horrific challenges facing them.

Following the hasty U.S. withdrawal and the sudden collapse of former President Ashraf Ghani's government last August — and the takeover of the entire country by the Taliban — rapid developments have taken place which has brought about serious political, economic, social and security ramifications for the entire region.

As a neighboring country that enjoys historical, cultural, linguistic, and religious bonds with Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran cannot remain indifferent to the plight of the Afghan people. During the last 42 years, Iran has used its good offices to bring Afghan factions — many with different ethnic and religious backgrounds — together to resolve their differences peacefully. For years, we have also been providing humanitarian assistance to more than three million Afghan refugees with practically little international support. The recent developments in Afghanistan have now meant that another few hundred thousand refugees have crossed the border into Iran. And again, we are hosting our Afghan brothers and sisters with almost no new resources from the international community. Besides food, shelter, medicine and education, we are now also providing the refugees with COVID-19 vaccines — all while we are under draconian and illegal US sanctions.

The current situation in Afghanistan requires a concerted international effort, and its neighboring countries can play a big role in this regard. We believe a regional approach — with the support of the UN — can help the Afghan people overcome the current crisis. We have supported a 6+2 format (neighboring countries plus Russia and the U.S. under the UN umbrella, and we are now hosting a meeting of Afghanistan's neighbors. With these efforts, there are a number of issues that require urgent attention: **See Page 7**

Iran Laughs Off UAE, Bahrain Claims on Its Islands

NEW YORK (IP) - The diplomatic mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations categorically rejected UAE and Bahrain claims at the United Nations regarding the three Iranian islands of Abu Musa, Greater, and Lesser Tunbs.

Responding to the territorial claims of the representative of the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain regarding the islands of Abu Musa, Greater and Lesser Tunbs, the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Fourth Committee of the UN General Assembly, described UAE and Bahrain's remarks as "false and baseless" claims over Abu Musa and the Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb islands.

He reiterated Iran's sovereignty over the islands and stated that the United Arab Emirates' claims constitute flagrant interference in Iran's domestic affairs, "Iran has always pursued a policy of good neighborliness, he said, expressing Iran's readiness to engage in bilateral talks with the United Arab Emirates to remove any misunderstanding that may exist between the two countries," he said. **See Page 7**

Tehran Faces Worst Drought in 50 Years

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - With a 97% decrease in monthly rainfall compared with last year, Iran's capital Tehran is facing its worst drought in half a century, a water resources official said.

Tehran has had 0.4 millimeters of rain since Sept. 23, compared with 14.3 millimeters over the same period in 2020, said Mohammad Shahriari, deputy director of the company that supplies the region. "Groundwater and surface water are at a critical state and there has not been a similar drought for the past 50 years," he was quoted as saying by Iran's Iranian Students News Agency.

The five dams supplying water to the capital are at less than a third of their capacity, holding just 477 million cubic meters (under 17 billion cubic feet) of water instead of 2 billion cubic meters. In September last year, the reserves held 729 million cubic meters of water.

Water consumption in the agricultural sector has gone up by 14% compared with last year, and by 8% for the industry. Hydroelectricity generation has dropped by 40% in the past six months, according to Shahriari.

Tehran is home to around 9 million people. In July, deadly protests broke out in the drought-hit southwestern province of Khuzestan after people took to the streets to vent their anger over water shortages.

Home Appliance Manufacturing Up Almost 10% in H1

TEHRAN (MNA) - Manufacturing of home appliances in Iran has risen 9.7 percent during the first half of the present Iranian calendar year (March 21-Septemehr 22), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, the latest data released by the Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry indicates.

The ministry's data put the six-month home appliance output at 2.294 million sets. Home appliances manufacturing has increased 78 percent to stand at 15 million sets in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20).

Rise in home appliances manufacturing and export has been also planned for the current year. Last year, the industry was able to achieve 78 percent growth despite the restrictions on the manufacturing sector, Deputy Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Mehdi Sadeqi Niaraki has said, adding, "While foreign brands left Iran, manufacturers were able to achieve this leap by relying on domestic capacities."

Back in April, the official had said that considering the Iranian home appliance industry's infrastructure and capacities, the country will be able to become an exporter of such products in the near future because most of the raw materials needed by the mentioned sector are produced domestically.

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No Permit Needed for People of Azerbaijan Republic Visiting Iran

BAKU (IP) - The Iranian embassy in Baku said in a statement on Tuesday that following the containment of the COVID-19 pandemic in Iran, the commuter citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan from the air and land borders do not require a permit when entering Iran.

: In the past 9 months, 9,000 citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 38 groups were allowed to enter the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran after obtaining the necessary permission in the consular section of the Iranian embassy in Baku.

President Sees No Restrictions in Growing Ties With Pakistan

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



Meanwhile Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, for his part, said that Pakistan-Iran ties were interwoven and rooted in strong commonalities.

Qureshi expressed confidence on growing ties between Iran and Pakistan. Qureshi said that Iran-Pakistan relations which stemmed from historical, religious, and geographical commonalities as well as lengthy borders was a means to achieve peace, welfare, and stability in the region, according to the press release.

The Pakistani foreign minister appreciated Iran for its regional stances, including Kashmir Muslims issue, and described Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamane'i's influential views as valuable in this regard, the press release continued.

It added that Qureshi briefed Iranian president on Islamabad's views on the latest developments in Afghanistan and called on the international community to help Afghan people on the grounds of humanitarian feelings.

Pakistani foreign minister also said that continuation of exchange of opinions between Afghanistan neighbors was necessary, because peace, welfare, and stability in the region depended on Afghanistan's improvement.

He submitted Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's invitation to President Raisi to pay a visit to Pakistan.

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi has expressed hope for the formation of a government in Afghanistan which would represent all groups and strata of people in the country and said regional countries could play an effective role in building security in Afghanistan.

The Iranian President made the remarks in a meeting with Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi here on Tuesday.

Raisi said Iran saw no restrictions in growing economic and security relations with Pakistan as well as exchange of economic and political delegations between the two countries.

On Afghanistan issue, he said Iran was seriously concerned about the plight of people there and highlighted the importance of cooperation with Pakistan as a country that plays an effective role in materializing security and tranquility in the country.

President Raisi said Iran holds the U.S. responsible for the insecurity in Afghanistan which is due to the presence of ISIS after the expulsion of the Americans from Afghanistan because "the problems in Afghanistan are the work of the Americans because ISIS was formed by the United States."

Referring to the meeting of foreign ministers of Afghanistan's neighboring countries to be hosted by Iran, he expressed hope that the meeting can cut off the hands of Americans from the region and find a solution to solve Afghanistan's problems.

Raisi Urges Alertness Against Cyberattack

TEHRAN (IRNA)- President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi underlined the necessity of predicting, preventing, and outfitting against cyberattacks, noting that the cyberattack on gas stations taken place yesterday was aimed at disturbing people's everyday activities.

Speaking in a cabinet meeting, Raisi said that the cyberattack on Tuesday that disrupted gas stations nationwide in Iran was aimed at interrupting people's daily lives so that the perpetrators could achieve their specific goals.

The cyberattack couldn't confuse officials as they immediately handled the situation, the President noted, adding that people also put their consciousness on display and didn't let the perpetrators abuse them.

He directed the Ministry of Petroleum to compensate for possible impacts suffered by the people during the disruption in the petrol distribution system.

Raisi underlined that any Iranian citizen, regardless of their faith, religion, race, and ethnicity, has specific rights and the Government has a duty to serve them.

U.S. Afghan Presence Has Led to Nothing But Bloodshed

TEHRAN (IFP) - President Ebrahim Raisi says the presence of the US in Afghanistan has led to nothing but misery, murder, bloodshed, and holding Afghanistan back.

The President made the remarks in a meeting with Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan Abdulaziz Kamilov in Tehran on Tuesday night.

The President described the relations between Iran and Uzbekistan brotherly and developing, and said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran does not see any restrictions in the development of relations with Uzbekistan in various political, economic and cultural fields."

Speaking in a meeting with the Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan Abdulaziz Kamilov, Raisi referred to the commonalities and capacities of cooperation between Tehran and Tashkent, saying, "Iran and Uzbekistan enjoy brotherly and kinship relations".

Referring to the two countries' common concern about the situation in the region, especially in Afghanistan, the President said, "The result of the presence of outsiders, especially the United States, in Afghanistan is nothing but misery, murder, bloodshed and holding Afghanistan back. We must help the Afghan people taste peace and security".



Referring to the presence of about four million Afghans in Iran and the continuation of Iran's humanitarian aid to these suffering people, Raisi said, "I hope a common solution and vision will be found at the meeting of foreign ministers of Afghanistan's neighboring countries".

At the same meeting, the Foreign Minister of

Uzbekistan Abdulaziz Kamilov said, "The two countries have a high capacity and potential for the development of relations, and we are determined to take advantage of these capacities".

Stating that Uzbekistan welcomes the initiative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to look into the situation in Afghanistan, he said, "Given that the superpowers could not do anything for Afghanistan, the Tehran summit is of great political importance and we fully support its results".

Noting that the establishment of peace and stability in the region is in the interest of both countries and countries in the region, the Uzbek Foreign Minister said, "Uzbekistan seeks close cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran in various regional and international areas".

Cyberattack on Gas Stations Likely Waged From Abroad

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The secretary of Iran's Supreme Council of Cyberspace says experts have successfully contained the disruption in gas stations across the country in the aftermath of a "widespread" cyberattack, which was possibly launched from abroad.

Abolhassan Firouzabadi made the remarks at a TV program on Tuesday night, hours after a nationwide disruption at gas stations halted subsidized fuel access for millions of Iranian drivers.

"The attack was so widespread that disrupted services at the country's entire 4,300 gas stations," he said.

"It is possible that the assault, like the cyberattack that hit the systems of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways, was carried out from abroad," he added, noting that the

results of a probe into the incident will be announced in the next 7 or 10 days.

Firouzabadi also said that the cyberattack did not cause any hardware damage and only disrupted the service to citizens.

Iranian experts, he explained, were able to find a solution to the problem in a short period of time.

"Although this cyberattack has been contained now, it has caused a lot of difficulties. We hope that all gas stations will return to normal status tomorrow," he added.

The cyberattack targeted software controlling smart cards used for cheaper rationed gasoline.

Experts, however, managed to make gas stations operate manually and sell fuel at the higher, unsubsidized rate.

Iran, Belgium Discuss Bilateral Issues, JCPOA | Tehran, Minsk FMs Discuss Issues of Mutual Concern

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs met and held talks with the Director for European Affairs of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brussels on the JCPOA, bilateral issues and Afghanistan.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani met with the Director for European Affairs of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Theodora Gentzis on Wednesday.

Referring to Bagheri's meeting with Gentzis, the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs wrote in a Wednesday tweet, "Open exchange of views on the nuclear agreement with Iranian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Bagheri Kani."

"Belgium considers that the JCPOA remains the best instrument for a mutually acceptable solution to the nuclear issue", it added.

Iran, Belgium discuss bilateral issues, JCPOA

Ali Bagheri Kani also pointed out to his meeting with Gentzis in a tweet, saying, "On a busy day of diplomatic activity in Brussels, I had an early morning meeting & working breakfast with Theodora Gentzis, Secretary-General of the FM of the Kingdom of Belgium, at Palais d'Egmont".

"We discussed a host of bilateral issues, Afghanistan and other int'l matters", he added.

TEHRAN (IP) - In a telephone conversation with his Belarusian counterpart, Iranian foreign minister discussed Iranians trapped in the Belarus-Lithuania border region.

Hossein Amir-Abdollahian called for the humanitarian cooperation of the Belarusian consular and border officials to help these people and their return to Iran.

The Belarusian Foreign Minister, Vladimir Maki, also stressed Minsk's serious readiness to provide maximum assistance in this regard and to continue close contact with the Iranian embassy.

Vladimir Maki asked for more information about the location of these people.

Inclusive Afghan Gov't Leads to Peace

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Iranian president, in a meeting with the visiting Turkmen foreign minister in Tehran, said the formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan will lead to the regional peace and stability.

President Ebrahim Raisi reiterated existing will to expand relations with Turkmenistan in bilateral, regional and international arenas and said the current level of cooperation between the two countries was far below capacities.

The President made the remarks in a meeting with the visiting Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan Rashid Meredov during which he highlighted the will of two countries official to expand ties and said bilateral cooperation could help boost regional peace and stability.

He expressed his gratitude to Turkmenistan for supporting Iran's permanent membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which he believed was to the deep and strong cultural and religious bonds between the two nations.

Stressing dissatisfaction with the current level of cooperation between Ashgabat and Tehran, the Iranian President said further expansion of mutual cooperation in various fields particularly transit and energy sectors will benefit the whole region.

Commenting on the situation in Afghanistan, he highlighted the need for establishment of peace and security there which would lead to the formation of an inclusive government there which must represent all ethnic and political groups.

The Turkmen Foreign Minister, too, expressed his country's interest in strengthening and deepening comprehensive Tehran-Ashgabat relations and stressed that Turkmenistan regarded Iran as a brother and friendly country and thus sought to increase the level of relations and cooperation with Iran in various fields including oil, gas, transportation and trade.

He said Turkmenistan supported the initiative of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Afghanistan and was ready to have close relations and cooperation with Tehran at all regional levels.

U.S. Involved in Afghanistan's Insecurity, Responsible for Daesh Formation

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi has expressed grief over the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, saying the United States is certainly involved in the ongoing insecurity in the war-torn country.

Raisi made the remarks during separate meetings with the visiting foreign ministers of Pakistan and Tajikistan in Tehran on Tuesday, as high-ranking officials from Afghanistan's six neighboring states plus Russia are set to meet in the Iranian capital on Wednesday.

"There must be an inclusive government in Afghanistan that can ensure the country's security and end war, bloodshed and fratricide," Raisi said.

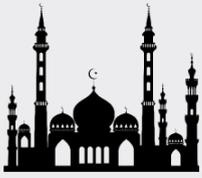
The Iranian president expressed concern over the current situation in Afghanistan and said the US is to blame for the country's instability as it is responsible for the formation of the Daesh terrorist group.

"Terrorist incidents in Afghanistan hurt every human being, and there is no doubt that the Americans are involved in such incidents and do not want the Afghan people to achieve peace and security," he added.

Raisi also said he hopes that the meeting of the foreign ministers of Afghanistan's neighboring countries can lead to coordination and joint dialogue in the formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan.

Earlier in the day, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian reaffirmed the need for the establishment of an inclusive government in Afghanistan, saying Tehran remains in contact with all sides in the neighboring country, including the interim government in Kabul.

Amir-Abdollahian said Afghanistan's Taliban-controlled interim government should be encouraged to fulfill and informed of its responsibility to promote peace, stability and security in the war-ravaged country.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	11:48
■ Evening (Maghreb)	17:32
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:59
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:23

56. Thus did We give established power to Joseph in the land, to take possession therein as, when, or where he pleased. We bestow of our Mercy on whom We please, and We suffer not, to be lost, the reward of those who do good.
57. But verily the reward of the Hereafter is the best, for those who believe, and are constant in righteousness.
Surah 12. Joseph (56-57)

Tehran Determined To Settle Gas Debt To Ashgabat

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Oil Minister Javad Owji says an overdue debt to neighboring Turkmenistan for imports of natural gas in the past will be settled for good.

Owji said on Tuesday that an administrative government that came to office in August will not hesitate to settle the gas debt dispute with Turkmenistan unlike a previous administration which sought to delay the payment.

"Luckily we had good talks for settling the debt to Turkmenistan based on preparations we had carried out," said Owji after meeting a senior delegation from Turkmenistan led by the country's foreign minister Rashid Moradov.

"The government's and (President Ebrahim) Raisi's determination is to settle this debt," he said.

In a ruling issued last year, the International Court of Arbitration (ICC) endorsed claims by Turkmenistan's state-run gas company Turkmen Gas that it is owed around \$1.5 billion by the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) in arrears related to the supply of gas to Iran over 10 years to 2017.

The two companies have agreed to keep details of the ICC ruling confidential while the Iranian Oil Ministry has dismissed reports that the ICC has ordered Iran to pay \$500 million in interest and fines on delayed payments related to the gas deal.

Owji said Iran is keen to resume imports of gas from Turkmenistan which once



amounted to around 40 million cubic meters per day under the deal with Turkmen Gas and was mainly aimed at supplying gas to areas in north and northeastern Iran where the country's gas grid is not sufficiently expanded.

He noted that the resumption of Turkmen gas exports to Iran could be the first step in the comprehensive development of relations between the two neighbors, noting that the policy of the 13th administration is to expand bilateral relations with neighbors, including Turkmenistan.

Owji further voiced Iran's readiness to export technical and engineering services to Turkmenistan, saying that Iran has a high capacity in the petrochemical, refinery, onshore and offshore drilling, and oil and gas industry equipment that can be provided to Turkmenistan.

He said the main purpose of the meeting was to promote relations with the friendly and brotherly country of Turkmenistan.

The comments come as Owji and other Iranian energy officials are expecting a major surge in demand for natural gas during the upcoming winter season when shortages can lead to lower supplies to power plants and cause power cuts in large cities.

Kazakh Ambassador Hails Iran Role in SCO



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Kazakhstan's Ambassador to Iran Askhat Orazbay said on Tuesday that Iran enjoys a high capacity to be an influential member of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

The ambassador made the remarks during a meeting in Tehran with Managing Director of Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) Ali Naderi.

He said that there is a chance now for IRNA and the news agencies of other SCO member countries to have closer cooperation within the framework of the goals of the organization to meet the interests of the member-states.

Orazbay, who used to be a journalist before the independence of his country, expressed hope that Iran-Kazakhstan media cooperation, especially between IRNA and Kazinform news agencies, will increase more than ever.

"We hope that in the future we will see the establishment of the office of the Islamic Republic News Agency in Nur-Sultan and its transformation into a regional office to cover the developments in Central Asia," the ambassador said.

3rd Iran-Germany Energy Working Committee Held



TEHRAN (Shana) - The Director General of Europe, U.S. and Caspian Neighbors Office of the International Affairs and Trade Department of the Ministry of Petroleum said: "Considering Germany's membership in the European Union, the Energy Working Committee can play an effective role in expanding relations with other European countries and provide a good basis for cooperation with EU members."

Hossein Ismaili talked about the focus of the third meeting of the Iran-Germany Energy Working Committee, which was held today (Tuesday, October 26) at the central building of the Ministry of Petroleum: "Renewable energies, increasing efficiency and productivity and reducing energy intensity, transfer new technologies and the cooperation of the German public and private sectors with the Ministries of Petroleum, Energy and their affiliates were the most important topics discussed at the meeting."

He said that in this working committee, representatives of BMWI, GIZ, Dena, German Ministry of Economy and Energy and the representative of the German Embassy in Tehran with representatives of the Presidential Transformation and Development Cooperation Center, Ministry of Petroleum, Ministry of Energy, SATBA and Fuel Consumption Optimization Company examined ways of cooperation between the two countries.

"It was decided that the delegations of the two sides, within the framework of the agreements reached, follow up on the issues considered and plan to hold the fourth energy committee," he added.

The Iranian delegation was chaired by Hossein Ismaili and the German delegation was chaired by Ms. Ursula Borak, Deputy Director General for International Energy of the German Ministry of Economy and Energy.

Iran-Syria Free Trade Deal to Take Effect Soon

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A free trade agreement signed between Iran and Syria back in 2010 is going to be implemented soon after years of postponement, Farzad Piltan, the director-general of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO)'s Office of Arabian and African Countries announced.

"The free trade agreement with Syria was signed in [the Iranian calendar year] 1389 (started in March 2010), but was inactive for some reason, and its implementation is expected to resume soon," the TPO portal quoted Piltan as saying on Tuesday.

The two countries signed the free trade agreement in a bid to boost bilateral trade, especially in industry, mining, and agriculture.

According to Piltan, except for 88 items, the exchange of all commodities between the two countries was subject to the free trade agreement, based on which, the two countries' businessmen were allowed to exchange goods only by paying a four-percent tariff.

"Despite the signing of this agreement, due to the policies of the governments of Iran and Syria in the field of export and import and the ban and restrictions imposed on various items, traders were not able to use this agreement practically," he added.

The implementation of this agreement with Syria, which the Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Reza Fatemi Amin is scheduled to pursue during a recent visit to Syria, means that the two countries' traders will be exempt from current export and import restrictions and bans in their exchanges, Piltan explained.

The official further mentioned some of the problems that the two countries' traders are currently facing, saying: "There are other problems in the way of boosting trade with Syria; Transportation of goods by sea is time-consuming, and this has led to additional cost of exporting goods to the Syrian market; Transportation by land is also not possible, because the goods must be transported through Iraq to Syria, which requires a tripartite agreement, which, of course, being pursued by the government, but it will take time until it is finalized."

Meanwhile on Monday it was reported that Iran and Syria will sign a free trade agreement in late November, according to the Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) of Iran.

TPO chief Alireza Payman Pak said on Monday that the free trade deal between Iran and Syria will be finalized during a trip by Iranian trade minister to Syrian capital Damascus on November 29.

Payman Pak said Iran will also implement a free trade deal with Pakistan as well as two preferential trade agreements with Indonesia and Venezuela in the near future.

The announcement is a fresh sign Iran is intent on expanding its non-crude exports to offset losses suffered on crude sales in recent years mainly because of US sanctions.

Astara, Astrakhan Port Called Sisters

MOSCOW (IRNA) - The signing ceremony for declaring the port of Iran's Astara and the Russian sea port of Astrakhan as sister ports was held online on Tuesday in a ceremony attended by officials from both sides.

Iran's Consul General in Russia's Astrakhan Region Mehdi Akouchian said that Iran and Russia will see an increase in the exchange of goods between these two strategic ports, as well as the development of economic relations between the two states, with this adoption agreement.

He added that "we expect to see the development of exports of goods and transit through these two ports from today, given the shared and special capacities of these two ports and the increase in cooperation".

Pointing to the importance of the increase of goods between these two ports, he noted that the North-South International Corridor will be operational as soon as possible and they will see the export of Iranian goods and transit of goods from India to Russia plus Europe and from Europe to the east through Iran.

Referring to the stable growth in exchanges between Iran and Astrakhan, the Russian official noted that last year there were over three million tons of commodity exchanges between Astrakhan and Iran, which showed an increase of 15 percent compared to the previous year,

and all kinds of goods were exchanged from Iran to Russia and Northern Europe.

The Russian official further noted that close cooperation and communication between Iranian and Russian ports in the Caspian Sea and Astrakhan is very important.

He highlighted that Russia is ready to cooperate with Iran to increase the exchange of goods between the two sides.

Iran Eyes 1,100 Ton/Year Odorant Output by 2023

TEHRAN (Shana) - The Deputy Minister of Petroleum for Gas announced that the country's production capacity of odorant would reach 1,100 tons per year by 2023.

According to the National Iranian Gas Company, Majid Chegeni said Iran is the third producer of gas odorant in the first South Pars refinery.

Chegeni added: "Using the power of specialists, researchers and domestic companies through Iran Gas Engineering and Development Company, the company designed, supplied equipment and constructed a natural gas odorant production unit with a capacity of 800 tons per year, which due to restrictions, production capacity in the first step was 200 tons." He added: "But with the efforts of experts and with the changes made in one year in the refinery feedstock, the production capacity has now reached 550 tons per year."

The Deputy Minister of Petroleum stated that the long-term design of this project, which is still with the Research Institute of Petroleum Industry (RIPI) will lead to a higher production of this strategic item, and said: "Based on this design model and using feed concentration, the production capacity of the item will reach 1,100 tons per year in the next two years."

Iran, Turkmenistan Agree To Double Rail Transit

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Roads and Urban Development Minister Rostam Qassemi said that Iran and Turkmenistan have reached agreements on several areas, including doubling rail transit.

Speaking in the opening session of the 16th Iran-Turkmenistan joint commission on economic cooperation on Tuesday, Qassemi said that the two countries had a multi-billion-dollar trade, but the coronavirus pandemic imposed some limitations.

He said that he had a meeting with Turkmenistan's foreign minister during which they reached agreements on energy, gas, electricity, and transportation.

Qassemi also noted that he had discussed with the Turkmen foreign minister the possibility of Turkmenistan's participation in Iran-India-Afghanistan agreement on Chabahar Port to transport goods from the southern port in Iran to northern countries, including Russia.

Turkmenistan's Foreign Minister Rashid Meredov is in Iran to participate in the ministerial meeting of Afghanistan neighbors.

MSC Sets Record for Daily Melting in Country

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN - Head of steelmaking and casting sector in Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC) announced new record for daily melting in the steelmaking unit of MSC for the umpteenth consecutive times and said this time the record was set with 150 daily melts at the steelmaking unit of the company.

Gholamreza Salimi said that this is the umpteenth consecutive times for records on daily melting at the steelmaking unit of the company.

He said that in the first day of the month of Farvardin the company said the record with 140 melts, in the sixth day with 141 melts, in the last day of Ordibehesht with 144, in the last day of month of Shahrivar with 146 melts, in the fifth day of month of Mehr with 147 melts and finally the company set the recent record on Mehr 29 with 150 daily melts at the steelmaking and continuous casting unit of the company.

U.S. Criticizes Israel On Settlements

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States on Tuesday voiced concern about Israel's decision to build settlements in the West Bank, saying it will "strongly oppose" such expansion on occupied Palestinian land.

The criticism by President Joe Biden's administration was some of the strongest in years on Israel after previous leader Donald Trump gave his blessing to settlements and annexations.

"We are deeply concerned about the Israeli government's plan to advance thousands of settlement units," State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters.



Bulgaria Hits Record High Daily Coronavirus Cases

SOFIA (Dispatches) - Bulgaria's tally of coronavirus infections has risen by 6,813 in the past 24 hours, a record daily increase as the European Union's least vaccinated country grapples with a fourth wave of the pandemic, official data showed on Wednesday.

The virus has killed 124 people in the past 24 hours, according to the figures, bringing the total death toll to 23,440.

More than 7,300 people were in COVID-19 wards as hospitals across the Balkan country struggled to deal with the inflow of coronavirus patients amid a shortage of medical staff.



Haiti Crippled by Fuel Shortages as Gang Leader Demands PM Resign



PORT-AU-PRINCE (Dispatches) - Haiti's streets were unusually quiet on Tuesday and gasoline stations remained dry as gangs blocked the entrance to ports that hold fuel stores and the country's main gang boss demanded that Prime Minister Ariel Henry resign.

Days-long fuel shortages have left Haitians with few transportation options and forced the closure of some businesses. Hospitals, which rely on diesel generators to ensure electricity due to constant blackouts, may shut down as well.

The situation has put further pressure on a population already struggling under a weakening economy and a wave of gang kidnappings, which include the abduction earlier this month of a group of Canadian and American missionaries.

Jimmy "Barbecue" Cherizier, leader of the "G9" coalition of gangs in the metropolitan area of the capital, Port-au-Prince, said in a radio interview on Monday night that he would ensure safe passage of fuel trucks if Henry leaves office.

"The areas under the control of the G9 are blocked for one reason only - we demand the resignation of Ariel Henry," Cherizier said in an interview on Haiti's Radio Mega.

"If Ariel Henry resigns at 8 a.m., at 8:05 a.m. we will unblock the road and all the trucks will be able to go through to get fuel."

A spokesperson for Henry's office did not respond to a request for comment. Reuters was unable to contact Cherizier.

His statements show how gangs have taken on an increasingly political role following the July assassination of President Jovenel Moïse. Cherizier has said Henry should "answer questions" linking him to Moïse's murder. Henry has denied any involvement.

Elections had originally been scheduled for November but were suspended after Henry last month dismissed the council that organizes elections, which critics had accused of being biased in favor of Moïse. Henry has promised to appoint a non-partisan council that will set a new date.

Kidnappings have been in the headlines for months as Haitians from all walks of life face abduction by the increasingly powerful gangs.

The missionaries traveling as part of a trip organized by Ohio-based Christian Aid Ministries were abducted by a gang called 400 Mawozo that operates east of the capital and is seeking a ransom of \$1 million for each person.

Erdogan Urges Armenia to Mend Ties With Azerbaijan

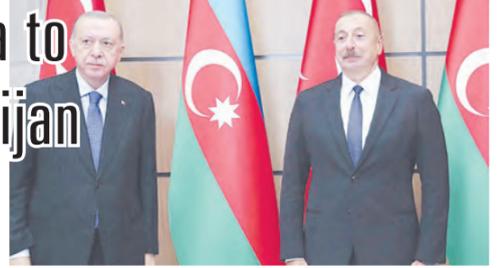
BAKU (Dispatches) - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Tuesday said Armenia should mend ties with arch foe Azerbaijan if it wants better relations with Ankara.

Turkey and Armenia have no diplomatic relations, a closed frontier and a long history of hostility rooted in massacres of Armenians under the Ottoman Turks during World War I.

The bitter relationship has deteriorated more recently over Turkey's support for Azerbaijan, which last year fought a war with Armenia for control of the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

On a visit to Azerbaijan on Tuesday, Erdogan set out conditions if Yerevan wanted better ties with Ankara. "If Armenia shows sincere goodwill towards Azerbaijan, then there will be no obstacles for the normalisation of ties between Turkey and Armenia," Erdogan said.

"Turkey will reciprocate to Armenia's steps aimed at building lasting peace in the region," he told a news conference after



Several Dead in Iraq Attack Blamed on IS Group

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - At least 11 people were killed late Tuesday in an attack on a village in eastern Iraq blamed on the Islamic State group, security sources said.

The attack on Al-Rashad in Diyala province left "11 dead and 13 wounded", a local security source said.

Another said that civilians were among those killed by small arms fire in the village, home to many members of the security services.

The area has been sealed off and reinforcements sent to hunt for the attackers, the first source said.

Both sources said most of the village's inhabitants belong to the same Bani Tamim tribe as the Diyala provincial governor.

IS surged to control large swathes of Iraq and Syria in 2014, but its "caliphate" later crumbled under successive attacks. Iraq declared it defeated in 2017 and the group was smashed in neighboring Syria in 2019.

But the jihadist threat remains and the group continues to carry out attacks. A UN report published early this year estimated that around 10,000 IS fighters remained active across Iraq and Syria.

In early September, 13 Iraqi federal police officers were killed in an IS attack on their checkpoint near northern city Kirkuk.

In July, the group claimed responsibility for an attack on a market in a Shiite district of Baghdad, Sadr City, in which around 30 people died.



Earlier this month, authorities announced two significant arrests outside Iraq: of the planner of a 2016 IS-claimed attack that killed 320 in Baghdad, and of IS's suspected finance chief, Sami Jasim al-Jaburi.

Indigenous Ecuadorans Block Roads to Protest Fuel Prices

QUITO (Dispatches) - Indigenous Ecuadorans blocked roads with rocks and burning tires Tuesday to protest soaring fuel prices as the country grapples with a state of emergency and battles challenges on multiple fronts.

The government had warned it would move to "prevent the closure of roads" to passengers and goods, and police and soldiers were deployed countrywide to monitor protesters.

In at least one location, police launched gas canisters in a standoff with demonstrators, and the office of rightist President Guillermo Lasso said 18 arrests had been made by afternoon.

The unrest comes as Ecuador simultaneously battles economic collapse worsened by the coronavirus pandemic, widespread popular discontent, violent crime blamed on drug gangs, and corruption allegations against Lasso, an ex-banker whose center-right economic policies are viewed with suspicion by many.

Protesters disrupted traffic in five of Ecuador's 24 provinces, including Pichincha, where a march was planned for the capital Quito later Tuesday.

"The security forces will see to it that law and order is

respected," insisted presidency spokesman Carlos Jijon, building on Lasso's earlier vow to prevent road closures.

The flex of authority has not deterred demonstrators.

"We have collectively taken this decision (to demonstrate) in the face of the new economic measures that are increasingly crushing our populations, our transport workers and our communities," protest organizer Julio Cesar Pilalumbo told AFP.

"We will resist and we will not give in to any repression," he said at a roadblock in Zumbahua in central Ecuador, where poncho-wearing women armed with spades and sticks helped men move large stones to block traffic.

Lasso tweeted that the protest "paralysis" meant "economic losses for small businesses, which sustain thousands of Ecuadorian families and households."

Fuel prices have nearly doubled since last year. Last Friday, Lasso announced another price hike to \$1.90 for a gallon (3.8 liters) of diesel -- up from \$1 in 2020 -- and \$2.55 for petrol.

He vowed it would be the last increase, but this was not enough to assuage anger with economic policy in a country that exports oil but imports much of the fuel it consumes.



Brazil Senate Report Backs Criminal Charges Against Bolsonaro

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - A Brazilian Senate investigative committee has approved a report that calls for President Jair Bolsonaro to be indicted for nine crimes related to his handling of the coronavirus pandemic, including crimes against humanity.

Tuesday's report, which is more than 1,300 pages long and took the opposition-controlled committee about six months to prepare, also alleges that 77 additional people and two companies committed crimes.

A draft report released last week had called for Bolsonaro to be indicted for genocide and murder, but senators later decided to drop those particular charges due to what lawmakers described as technical reasons. They also decided to add 10 people to the list of individuals who should be indicted.

Among the people added was Wilson Lima, the governor of interior Amazonas state, where a lack of hospital oxygen supplies resulted in deaths by asphyxia earlier this year. His government is currently under federal investigation for alleged corruption related to the purchase of medical equipment.

"The chaos of Jair Bolsonaro's government will enter history as the lowest level of human destitution," said Senator Renan Calheiros, rapporteur of the report, adding that the president was "on the side" of dictators, including Adolf Hitler and Augusto Pinochet.

Bolsonaro's press office did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Tuesday night. But Sen Flávio Bolsonaro, one of the president's sons, called the report legally weak and politically motivated.

"The intent of some senators on the investigative committee is to cause the maximum amount of wear and tear on the president," he told journalists. Lima also dismissed the inclusion of his name as political posturing.

"Putting my name in the final report has a motivation that is totally political and electoral," Lima said in a statement provided by his press office. "I wasn't even investigated by the committee."

The president has denied wrongdoing, and the decision on whether to file most of the charges will be up to Prosecutor-General Augusto Aras, a Bolsonaro appointee who is widely viewed as protecting him.

Sen Omar Aziz, the chairman of the inquiry, said he would deliver the recommendation to the prosecutor-general on Wednesday morning. Aras' office said the report would be carefully reviewed as soon as it is received.



Shanon
(adviser)

Parsian

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Sauna, J
roof garden
marble floor
pkg, & F.F

Farmanieh Villa (\$7000)
2000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
Sauna, J
nice yard
terrace, pkg
elegantly Furn

Kamranieh Apts
(\$1800) 160sq.m, 2bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, & F.F
(\$2700) 260sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, & F.F

Nice mountain View

Gheitarieh Apt (\$1800)
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balcony, & F.F

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Background: Cityscape with skyscrapers under a blue sky.

China Power Generators' Profits Tumble

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Earnings for China's power utilities during the first three quarters of 2021 have plunged as the companies were squeezed by surging coal costs that they could not pass on to consumers.

Huadian Power International, a subsidiary of China Huadian Corp on Tuesday reported profits for the January-September period dropped 58% from a year earlier to 1.6 billion yuan (\$251 million) with a third-quarter loss of 1.8 billion yuan.

Huaneng Power International (600011.SS), a listed arm of China Huaneng Group, also said their earnings in the first nine months of the year dropped 91% year-on-year to 783.9 million yuan, with a third quarter loss of 3.5 billion yuan.



Ocean Economy Offers a \$2.5 Trillion Export Opportunity

GENEVA (UNCTAD)- Facilitating market access, finance and technology transfer of ocean-based goods and services will help countries recover faster from the COVID-19 pandemic.

A new UNCTAD report estimates the export value in ocean-based industries at \$2.5 trillion, according to the latest available data, covering 2018.

The report, entitled "Advancing the Potential of Sustainable Ocean-Based Economies: Trade Trends, Market Drivers And Market Access", draws on a recently published novel international ocean economy classification.

The figure constitutes the first conservative benchmark from which to measure the evolution of trade in ocean-based goods and services. The methodology used is groundbreaking, as it's the first time that ocean- and land-based activities are separated using UN Comtrade data under the Harmonised System nomenclature for each country.

"This report contributes to better understanding, regulating and managing trade in ocean-based goods and services, said David Vivas, an UNCTAD legal officer working on ocean economy issues. "It's an important step forward in advancing progress on the trade-related targets of Sustainable Development Goal 14 on life under water."

The report assesses sustainability using UNCTAD's five ocean economy pillars, which add to the traditional economic, environmental and social sustainable development pillars. It also considers the relevance of science and technology as well as regulatory trade, fisheries and law of the sea frameworks. The report answers the call of the Bridgetown Covenant adopted at UNCTAD's 15th quadrennial conference, requiring the organization to "devise approaches to stimulate economic diversification and promote higher value-added production".

The report also provides useful analysis for preparations for next year's UN Second Oceans Conference in Lisbon. The biggest ocean-based industries in 2018, according to the report, were coastal and marine tourism (\$1.1 trillion), followed by marine high technology and other manufactures not classified elsewhere (\$595 billion) and maritime transport services (\$399 billion). For goods, the largest sectors were those with higher added value: marine high-technology manufactures, ships, port equipment and parts thereof. The leading exporters of ocean-based goods are developed countries from Europe, developing countries from Asia (even when China is excluded), followed by countries in the Americas (developed and developing).

A double-digit average export growth was observed for certain products with high added value, such as frozen finfish parts and fillet in the case of marine fisheries between 2016 and 2018, showing increased consumption trends, particularly in Asia, Europe and North America. The leading exporters of ocean-based goods and services were developed countries in Europe, followed by developing countries in Asia and countries in the Americas.

Due to data limitations, not all ocean-based industries – and particularly various services sectors – could be analysed, pointing to the necessity of better reporting.

Indonesia Sees Q3 GDP Growth at 4.5% Y/Y

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesia expects rising exports and a recovery in household consumption to result in economic growth of 4.5% in the third quarter, refining an earlier forecast for 4-5% growth, but headwinds lie ahead, its finance minister warned.

Southeast Asia's largest economy grew 7.07% in the second quarter, but a new wave of COVID-19 infections in July, triggered by the spread of the Delta variant, and measures to control the outbreak have hurt its economic recovery.

Third quarter data is due to be released on Nov.5. Referring to the new third quarter forecast as an upward revision, Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati said indicators for domestic demand had improved since the second week of August, when anti-virus measures began to be relaxed.

Exports from Indonesia, the world's biggest exporter of thermal coal and palm oil, have also surged amid record high prices. "This shows Indonesia's economy is quite bullish," Sri Mulyani said in an online news conference, adding that the economic impact of the virus resurgence was seen as "not too deep".

The minister also gave a new official forecast for 2021 full-year growth of 4%, compared with a previous forecast of 3.7% to 4.5%. Analysts predicted Indonesia's economy to have expanded 3.2% in the July-September quarter, and 4.6% in the current quarter, while 2021 growth was seen at 3.4%, according to a Reuters survey this month.



"In the fourth quarter, there remains potential for a rebound, although at a more normal rate. But the rebalancing of economic activities in China, the United States and the European Union could affect us in the fourth quarter and into next year," Sri Mulyani said. She listed the possibility of tapering in the United States and the European Union, a potential slowdown in China's economic growth and rising inflation globally, among other uncertainties, as potential headwinds to Indonesia's recovery.

The government was anticipating financial market volatility and lower demand for goods from emerging markets due to these global events, she added.

China, ASEAN Agree to Deepen Economic Integration

BEIJING (Dispatches) - The leaders of China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) agreed on Tuesday to deepen cooperation to help the region recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, including the early implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement.

In a joint statement issued following the 24th ASEAN-China Summit held online, China agreed to support the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework and its Implementation Plan, which will guide both sides in deepening their cooperation in various fields, including public health, social security, economic integration, digital transformation, and sustainable development.

ASEAN lauded China for its active cooperation in implementing key priorities identified in the framework, such as training health executives and professionals in health emergency response, supporting the COVID-19 ASEAN response fund, and expanding cooperation on COVID-19 vaccines.

Both sides stressed the importance of economic integration between China and ASEAN to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and speed up the region's economic recovery.

The leaders agreed to promote the China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement and explore broader mutual opening up in other areas under the free trade agreement, "including by creating more trade opportunities in the digital economy and fostering new sources of growth and cooperation."

They also stressed the need to strengthen cooperation to enhance the connectivity and resilience of supply chains in the region by exploring "the development of economic corridors, as well as economic, trade, and industrial parks."

Slowdown in S. Korean Economic Activity

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's economy jumped by 4 percent year-on-year in the third quarter of 2021, slowing from the 6 percent increase it experienced in the prior period, a preliminary estimate by The Bank of Korea showed.

Jumps in Covid-19 cases across the country have caused both private consumption and fixed investment to slow in this year's third quarter. Meanwhile, government expenditure increased by 6.3 percent, up from last

quarter's 5.3 percent growth rate.

In addition, the country's GDP recorded a quarterly growth of 0.3 percent, dropping from 0.8 percent in the previous period, according to preliminary estimates.

Unlike other central banks that hiked their interest rates, the Bank of Japan is set to keep its rates on hold.

Japan has been experiencing high producer prices in the last period, yet consumer inflation remained at zero due to weak domestic demand.

The bank is expected to maintain its targets for short-term interest rate and 10-year bond yields at -0.1 percent and 0 percent respectively.

Producer prices in Spain leaped by an annual rate of 23.6 percent in September, up from 17.6 percent in the previous month, official data showed. This is the highest rate since December 1977.

The hike in prices was driven by supply chain disruptions, energy shortages and last year's low base effects.

Similarly, Sweden's producer prices soared to a record high of 17.2 percent on a yearly basis in September, expanding from 15.8 percent in August, Statistics Sweden said.

Producer inflation has now risen for the eighth month in a row as costs of natural gas and crude oil helped fuel the increase in prices.

Singapore's manufacturing output fell by 3.4 percent year-on-year in September, declining sharply from last month's growth of 11 percent. Singapore Economic Development Board also said that a rise in the Delta variant cases contributed to the slip in production.

Biomedical manufacturing slumped by 35.9 percent while general manufacturing output declined by 2.7 percent in September, down from a growth rate of 6.4 percent in August.

Manufacturing output also declined on a monthly basis in September, decreasing by 2.8 percent.

Gas Crisis Helps to Land BP \$500m Windfall

LONDON (Dispatches) - BP's trading team made at least \$500 million in the third quarter of 2021, two sources with knowledge of the company's trading results said, as the energy major benefitted from a gas crisis that has left consumers and industries smarting.

Natural gas and power prices soared to an all-time high in Europe and parts of Asia in August as the global economy recovered from the pandemic and energy consumption increased faster than supplies.

Low gas stocks after a cold winter and hot summer as well as poor renewables output contributed to the rally.

The increase in power bills sparked protests in Spain and put European governments under pressure to find ways to protect consumers and industry and calm the markets. European Union countries failed to agree on a bloc-wide response on Tuesday.

In China, the government has taken measures to increase coal output and reform power markets to ensure homes are heated this winter.

BP's gas trading results were disclosed at an internal call with staff earlier this month, the sources said, asking not to be named because they are not authorized to speak to the media. BP declined to comment for this story.

The gains were made as customers in Europe and Asia rushed to buy Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) from the United States and other parts of the world to cope with shortages - in a reversal of the situation two years ago when LNG producers faced a global glut.

BP's strong gas trading results are likely to provide an early indication of how some of the other international energy companies will benefit from the global gas crunch.

BP has a smaller LNG and gas trading book than its rivals, including Shell and Equinor, which could post even higher profits.

Shell, Equinor and BP will report results this and next week. Energy companies typically do not disclose details on profits and loss from trading in their quarterly earnings. They usually only state whether trading positively or negatively contributed to overall financial results.

BP and Shell are banking on cash flow from trading to support them through their transition to a business model less reliant on fossil fuels.

They need trading to generate profit as they focus more on renewable and power markets that tend to have lower margins than oil and gas.

BP's trading arm made nearly \$4 billion in 2020 in profits, almost equalling the record trading profit in 2019.

The company has pledged to cut oil and gas output, while Shell says its oil production has peaked. Both say they are expanding trading and they still make billions of dollars a year moving oil and gas around the world.

Although BP plans to expand power and renewables trading, many of those markets are highly regulated and unlikely to deliver the same profit margins as oil and gas.

Kishida Seeks Economic Plan In Early November



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida wants to draw up key economic proposals shortly after Sunday's general election, including the contents of a stimulus plan worth tens of trillions of yen.

The plan could come as soon as early November, Kishida said Tuesday, and Economy Minister Daishiro Yamagiwa said helping those who have suffered an economic hit from the coronavirus would be top of the agenda. Kishida, who took office earlier this month, has been trying to win over voters with his pledges on building a "new capitalism," in which the fruits of economic growth are spread more widely.

His long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party and its junior coalition partner are expected to keep their parliamentary majority, a poll from Kyodo News showed Wednesday, but the scale of victory will be key. Losing too many seats could loosen Kishida's grip over the party, which could dispatch him through the "revolving door" that claimed six premiers between 2007-2012.

The new prime minister is set to take his first overseas trip almost immediately after the election. He is likely to head to the U.K. for the COP26 climate talks, which could also provide his first chance as premier to meet U.S. President Joe Biden.

Meanwhile, the focus of social media in Japan was on an apology Kishida reportedly offered after deputy party leader Taro Aso asserted that climate change should be seen in a positive light, because it had made it possible to grow delicious rice on the northern island of Hokkaido.

Iran Eyes Strong Cooperation With Austria

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The president of Iran expressed hope for the promotion of cooperation with Austria in various fields.

In a message to his Austrian counterpart Alexander Van der Bellen on Wednesday, President Ebrahim Raisi congratulated the European country's government and people on its National Day.

He said the historical and friendly interaction between the two nations and the diverse capacities for mutual cooperation have always paved the way for the expansion of their relations in bilateral, regional and international areas.



French Socialists Fight to Survive as Presidential Test Looms

LILLE (Dispatches) - With only six months before the election, she travelled to the northern French city of Lille at the weekend for a campaign event where questions about her candidacy were on everyone's minds.

"Is she really going to represent everyone, and are her opinions going to matter to us?" asked Marion Doublet, a student at the University of Lille, who came to hear Hidalgo's plans at the city's Rem Koolhaas-designed conference center on Saturday.

Doublet said she was hesitating between Hidalgo and the Greens candidate Yannick Jadot, who is currently leading among the country's deeply fragmented left in opinion polls.

Hidalgo is stuck at four to seven percent, in line with the disastrous six percent result for the Socialists in 2017, when Francois Hollande abandoned his re-election hopes after the most unpopular presidency in modern history.

"I'm here to convey a project of social, ecological and democratic reconquest," Hidalgo told a crowd of 1,700 party members, pledging pay hikes including a doubling of teacher salaries as well as a "climate wealth tax" for fighting global warming.

The Socialists' survival is on the line -- if Hidalgo fails to secure at least five percent in the first round of voting next April, the state will not reimburse her campaign spending, a prospect the cash-strapped party cannot afford.

It was already forced to sell its historic headquarters in Paris after the 2017 debacle, and chairman Olivier Faure has struggled since then to show that his party, rooted in the legacy of unionism and a state-managed economy, has a viable plan for a country wrestling with immigration, insecurity, inequality and the fallout of the Covid crisis.

"The problem with Anne Hidalgo is that she has no political identity. She's never been a minister, she doesn't seem to have political beliefs -- no one knows what she thinks," said Remi Lefebvre, a political scientist at the University of Lille.

Most Socialist voters have migrated to the Greens, the far left of Jean-Luc Melancon, or the centrist platform of President Emmanuel Macron, said Emeric Brehier, a former Socialist lawmaker now with the Fondation Jean-Jaures think tank.

And many are unlikely to come back.

"The party hasn't worked enough to show people its vision for the world of tomorrow and for the next 30 years. What does it mean to be a Socialist or a social democrat today?" Brehier said.

"You ask anyone what are the two or three main things the party proposes, including the six percent that are going to vote for Hidalgo, I don't know what they would be able to come up with," he said.

To make matters worse, Hidalgo is widely seen as embodying an elitist Socialist party, urban and wealthy, with little time for the concerns of everyday French outside Paris.

"She's the mayor of Paris, and that doesn't give her a favourable image in a France with lots of inequality," Lefebvre said.



But the Socialists had no other candidates with any national stature. Even Hollande has denounced Hidalgo as "lilliputian", though many say Hollande -- who alienated swathes of leftist voters with tax rebates for companies -- has only himself to blame for the party's demise.

"Hollande was the party's gravedigger," Lefebvre said, dismissing any chance that he would do better than Hidalgo, as the former president has hinted in media interviews.

Hidalgo vowed Monday that despite her grim polling numbers she would pursue her campaign to the end, ruling out any alliance with the Greens to propel the French left into the second round.

But unless her candidacy gains ground, the political calculus may prove too costly. Beyond the risk of no campaign spending funds, a poor showing could smash Socialist hopes for parliamentary elections a few weeks after the presidential -- losing more seats would automatically end the subsidies it gets from the state.

That could make a deal with the Greens unavoidable, with Hidalgo giving up her quest in exchange for ensuring that Socialists retain key districts.

"The party won't recover, or only with great difficulty, from a second campaign where you only get six percent," Brehier said.

But for now, party faithful say their cause is not yet lost.

"I think that despite everything she still has a chance," said Nadia Metref, a Socialist councillor for the Val d'Oise department north of Paris who attended Hidalgo's rally in Lille. "Today we could use a feminine approach that could bring a bit of humanism back to the country," she said.

Johnson Voices Concern COP26 Might Go Wrong

LONDON (AFP) - But the UK leader told a special Downing Street press conference with children that he remained hopeful a deal can be done to reduce carbon emissions and limit future temperature rises.

"I'm very worried because it might go wrong and we might not get the agreements that we need and it's touch and go," Johnson said, as he fielded questions from the youngsters aged eight to 12.

"It's very, very far from clear that we'll get the progress that we need.

"It's very, very difficult, but I think it can be done."

The British premier said that the gathering running from Sunday to November 12 in the Scottish city was "perhaps the most important summit that this country has had in our lifetimes". It will be the biggest climate conference since the 2015 Paris summit and is seen as crucial in setting worldwide emission targets to slow global warming, as well as firming up other key commitments.

Johnson's downbeat assessment follows similar weekend comments by Alok Sharma, the British minister in charge of the talks, who warned success at COP26 would be "definitely harder" to achieve than in Paris.

Flanked by WWF UK chief executive Tanya Steele at Monday's kids' event, Johnson said striking a deal would require world leaders each "making some sacrifice".

"Each of them have got to agree to do something that's difficult for them -- whether it's stop using coal-fired power stations, or give some money to help the developing world, or start using electric vehicles," he said.

"I do think that world leaders are really starting to listen.

"I've talked to a lot of them in the last few weeks, and they're making some good commitments," the UK leader said.

Saudi Pledges More Than \$1b in Green Era Initiatives

RIYADH (AFP) - Two days after targeting carbon neutrality by 2060, and ahead of next week's COP26 global climate change summit, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman announced two initiatives to fund the "circular carbon economy" and provide "clean fuel" to help feed 750 million people worldwide.

The two initiatives were targeted to cost 39 billion riyals (\$10.4 billion). Saudi Arabia will contribute 15 percent and seek the remainder from regional funds and other countries, Prince Mohammed said.

"Today we are initiating a green era for the area, believing that these changes are not only for the environment but also for the economy and security," he told heads of state and other senior officials at the Middle East Green Initiative Summit in Riyadh.

"We will work on establishing an investment fund in solutions with circular carbon technology in the region and a global initiative which will supply solutions for clean fuel to provide food for more than 750 million people globally."

The "circular carbon economy" is a concept promoted by the Saudis which aims to remove and store carbon for reuse in other products.

The summit, which also featured the leaders of Qatar and Pakistan, and U.S. climate envoy John Kerry, follows Saturday's Saudi Green Initiative where Prince Mohammed announced a target of net zero carbon emissions by 2060.

Environmental group Greenpeace questioned the seriousness of that target, which comes after state oil firm Saudi Aramco said it planned to raise crude production capacity to 13 million barrels a day by 2027.

The watchdog also accused Saudi Arabia, one of the world's biggest polluters, of trying to divert criticism at the COP26 summit in Glasgow.

COP26 aims to set the world on a path to net zero by mid-century.

On Saturday, Saudi Arabia also said it would join a global effort to cut emissions of methane -- another planet-warming gas -- by 30 percent by 2030, while Aramco committed to being a carbon net zero enterprise by 2050.

The United Nations says more than 130 countries have set or are considering a target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by mid-century, an objective it says is "imperative" to safeguard a livable climate.

Iranian Tanker...

FROM PAGE 1

Earlier this month, Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said the two countries will sign a 20-year cooperation accord when President Nicolas Maduro visits Tehran "in the next few months".

A joint economic cooperation commission, which will be formed in Iran's capital before the end of the year which, will finalize the details of

the agreement, Amir-Abdollahian said in a joint press conference with his Venezuelan counterpart Felix Plasencia in Tehran.

Last month, a U.S. Treasury spokesperson said the US government was "concerned" about reports that Iran and Venezuela had reached major deals to increase their cooperation in the oil sector.

Iran Hosting Afghan...

FROM PAGE 1

The absolute necessity of the establishment of an inclusive government in Afghanistan.

Current efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people should be redoubled.

An international response to the flow of refugees into neighboring countries—including Iran—needs to be intensified. During recent years, the Afghan people, including women who represent half of the population, have made great progress in the advancement of their country.

Terrorism must be confronted with full vigor. Terrorist groups, including Daesh, should not be allowed to take advantage of the present situation in Afghanistan to cause havoc and terrorize the population.

The U.S. invasion and occupation of Afghanistan — lasting 20 years — in which many Afghans were killed by U.S. forces, and the subsequent irresponsible withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces has created a dangerous situation in a turbulent region. The international community has a moral responsibility to assist the Afghan people to stand on their own feet with honor and dignity.

Equally important, the people have a historical responsibility to put aside their differences and establish an inclusive and broad-based government with the participation of all ethnic and religious groups. This can only be achieved through intra-Afghan dialogue and absent foreign interference.

It is high time for the international community to join forces to expeditiously help the Afghan people. We in Iran are doing our part. The alternative — not just for Afghans but for all of us — can only be a disaster.

Iran Laughs...

FROM PAGE 1

"Iran has always pursued a policy of good neighborliness, he said, expressing Iran's readiness to engage in bilateral talks with the United Arab Emirates to remove any misunderstanding that may exist between the two countries," he said.

The representative of the United Arab Emirates had claimed that her country has sovereign right over Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunb islands and called on Iran to renew efforts to resolve that dispute diplomatically through the international court system.

The representative of Bahrain had also reiterated her country's support for the self-proclaimed right of the United Arab Emirates to restore sovereignty over Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunb islands.

Washington Blamed...

FROM PAGE 1

The United States must also stand by the international community in the serious measures that it will take to soothe the sufferings of the Afghan people and help the nation overcome its challenges, Amir-Abdollahian added.

Also addressing the event, Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber said the security of neighboring countries is intertwined with that of Afghanistan.

"Accordingly, we supported the initiative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to hold the first summit of the Afghanistan's neighboring states, hosted the second round of the meeting and welcome the hosting of a third round by the People's Republic of China," he added.

Mokhber also said the U.S. spent more than \$2.5 trillion to create a government in Afghanistan, but the failure of its irrational, irresponsible and reckless policy showed how alienated Washington is from the Afghan people, culture, and social environment.

"The United States and its NATO allies attacked Afghanistan two decades ago under the pretext of the 9/11 attacks purportedly to fight against terrorism. However, their 20-year invasion and occupation of Afghanistan has brought nothing other than insecurity, spread of extremism, rise of terrorism, economic backwardness, destruction of the foundations of independence, increase of drug production and the bereavement of Afghan families," he said.

"The scandalous U.S. escape without a sense of responsibility for the security and future of the country's people created painful and instructive scenes. It showed that America could not bring security, peace, stability and prosperity to the Afghan people and that reliance on foreign governments can keep no government in place."

Referring to recent terrorist attacks at mosques in the cities of Kandahar and Kunduz, he warned that Takfiri terror outfits like Daesh are operating as a US proxy force against Afghan citizens' security.

The Takfiris, he said, are trying to spark a new civil war by fueling discord and pessimism among different Afghan ethnic and religious groups.

"Today, it is the duty of the people and rulers of Afghanistan not to allow the reactionaries and aggressors to threaten the security of its people," he added.

Meanwhile addressing the conference, Pakistani Foreign Minister Mehmood Qureshi called on the world community to pay attention to the economic situation of the Afghan people and prevent the occurrence of human tragedy in that country.

Qureshi also stressed the need to free the assets of Afghanistan.

The Second Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan's Neighboring Countries started work in the Iranian capital on Wednesday. Foreign ministers of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan as well as envoys of China and Russia are present in the meeting, while foreign ministers of China and Russia have taken part virtually.

Referring to Taliban's August takeover in Afghanistan, Qureshi said the broad wave of refuge has been seen after.

About Tehran meeting, the Pakistani foreign minister said it is for ensuring coordination between Afghanistan's neighbors to manage the existing challenges.

He went on to stress that all are after seeing a stable Afghanistan.

Meanwhile Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi hailed the Second Meeting of Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan's Neighboring Countries in Tehran, saying it will reinforce diplomatic channels.

Addressing the event, Yi said China has held various consultations on the Afghanistan issue.

He added that Beijing will continue cooperation with different countries on Afghanistan aiming to improve the situation and to create a better life for Afghans.

Foreign ministers of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan as well as envoys of China and Russia attended the meeting.

Foreign ministers of China and Russia took part in the meeting virtually.

Tehran Ready for...

FROM PAGE 1

In a tweet on Monday, Baqeri-Kani said he would meet Mora, who acts as the coordinator of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal's Joint Commission, in Brussels to discuss the continuation of talks.

Earlier, a Wall Street Journal journalist had claimed in a series of tweets that the Iranian deputy foreign minister was not willing to meet with representatives of the three European countries involved in the nuclear deal.

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Berrettini Seals ATP Finals Spot

VIENNA (Dispatches) - Matteo Berrettini has become the sixth player to qualify for the season-ending ATP Finals in Turin next month after the Italian reached the second round of the Vienna Open, the ATP said.
The 25-year-old, who will make his second appearance at the ATP Finals, defeated Australia's Alexei Popyrin 7-6(3) 6-3 in the opening round.
The ATP Finals is played between the top eight men's singles players and doubles teams and will be held from Nov. 14-21.

Wolfsburg Name Kohfeldt as New Coach

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bundesliga club Wolfsburg named former Werder Bremen boss Florian Kohfeldt as head coach on Tuesday to replace Mark van Bommel, who was sacked last weekend.
After four years at Werder, Kohfeldt was dismissed in May following relegation from the Bundesliga, but the 39-year-old has now signed a two-year contract with Wolfsburg.
"I didn't have to think twice about accepting this challenge," Kohfeldt said in a Wolfsburg statement.

Tatum Powers Celtics to OT Win Over Hornets

BOSTON (Dispatches) - Jayson Tatum poured in 41 points, Jaylen Brown added 30 and the Boston Celtics rallied to end the host Charlotte Hornets' perfect start with a 140-129 overtime win.
After Dennis Schroder tied it at 129 on a 3-pointer with 2:41 left in overtime, Brown added a trey of his own and followed it with an emphatic dunk at the 1:21 mark. Schroder added four consecutive free throws and Tatum made two to put the game away.
Tatum dished eight assists while Brown grabbed nine rebounds. Schroder finished with 23 points, eight assists and six rebounds for Boston, which had dropped two in a row to open the season before a 107-97 win at Houston on Sunday.

Heat 107, Magic 90

Jimmy Butler scored 24 of his 36 points in the first half to fuel host Miami to its sixth win in seven meetings against Orlando.
Butler made 15 of 21 shots from the floor and added five steals, and his sharpshooting was significantly better than his previous game. He made just 7 of 22 shots in Miami's 102-91 overtime loss to the Indiana Pacers on Saturday.

Bucks 119, Pacers 109

Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 30 points, grabbed 10 rebounds and dished nine assists, Khris Middleton added 27 points and Milwaukee held on for a win over Indiana in Indianapolis.

An 11-2 run that sent Milwaukee into halftime and extended into the early third quarter gave the Bucks a double-digit-point lead for most of the second half. The gap grew to as many as 18 points.
Malcolm Brogdon led the Pacers with 25 points and seven assists, though he also committed seven turnovers. Domantas Sabonis contributed 21 points and 13 rebounds.

Raducanu Earns First Win Since U.S. Open Title

BUCHAREST (Dispatches) - U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu on Tuesday claimed her first victory since her shock triumph in New York as the British teenager beat Polona Hercog at the Transylvania Open in Romania.

Raducanu, 18, recovered from a set down to win 4-6, 7-5, 6-1 after nearly two hours and 30 minutes in the first round in Cluj-Napoca against Hercog, the world number 124 from Slovenia.

Making just her second appearance since the US Open, the 23rd-ranked Raducanu led 4-1 in the first set before Hercog won five games in a row.

The third seed saved a break point at 5-all in the second set and won a lengthy following game on Hercog's serve to force a decider.

Raducanu, born in Canada to parents from Romania and China, dominated the third set to secure her first victory in a WTA event and advance to a meeting with Romania's 106th-ranked Ana Bogdan.

"It means a lot to play in my dad's country," said Raducanu, who delighted the crowd by conducting most of her post-match interview in Romanian.

Raducanu stunned the tennis world at Flushing Meadows by becoming the first qualifier to win a Grand Slam title.

She had suffered a second-round loss to Aliaksandra Sasnovich at Indian Wells earlier this month in her first outing since the U.S. Open. "I don't think there is any pressure on me," Raducanu said on Monday. "I feel like everyone should just be a little patient with me."

Barcelona to Play Boca Juniors In Friendly Tribute to Maradona

SAO PAULO (Dispatches) - Spanish club Barcelona will play Argentine giants Boca Juniors in a December tribute match to mark the one year-anniversary of the death of their former player Diego Maradona, the two clubs announced.

"FC Barcelona and Club Atletico Boca Juniors will play the 'Maradona Cup' on Dec. 14, a game to pay tribute to the star Diego Armando Maradona when the first anniversary of his death is remembered," Barcelona said in a statement.



Nets reserve Patty Mills hit five 3-pointers and finished with 21 points.

Bulls 111, Raptors 108

DeMar DeRozan scored 26 points -- 11 in the fourth quarter -- and visiting Chicago defeated Toronto. DeRozan, a former Raptor, made three important jump shots late in the fourth quarter after Toronto had cut the lead to two.

Toronto's Fred VanVleet missed a 3-point attempt in the final second that would have tied the game. Zach LaVine added 22 points for the Bulls, who have won four games in a row to open the season. OG Anunoby scored 22 points for the Raptors, and VanVleet finished with 15 points and 17 assists.

Cavaliers 99, Nuggets 87

Jarrett Allen had 21 points and 16 rebounds, Kevin Love scored 22 points, and visiting Cleveland won at Denver.

Collin Sexton scored 14 points, Lauri Markkanen had 12 points and Evan Mobley amassed 10 points and eight rebounds for the Cavaliers.

Pelicans 107, Timberwolves 98

Brandon Ingram scored 27 points and Jonas Valanciunas had 22 points and 23 rebounds as New Orleans got its first victory of the season, defeating Minnesota in Minneapolis.

Devonte' Graham added 21 points and Nickeil Alexander-Walker had 17 as the Pelicans bounced back from a 96-89 loss at Minnesota on Saturday. They turned the ball over 20 times, but that was a significant improvement over the franchise-record-tying 30 they committed on Saturday.



Kimmich Sparks Vaccination Debate in Germany

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Joshua Kimmich will be under the spotlight for Bayern Munich at rivals Moenchengladbach tomorrow amid a fiery debate in Germany since the footballer revealed he opted not to be vaccinated against Covid-19.

The 26-year-old is set to play for Bayern in a German Cup second-round tie, but off the pitch, his decision not to get vaccinated has even drawn comment from the government in Berlin.

On Saturday, Kimmich revealed he decided against being vaccinated, despite having founded the "We Kick Corona" charity last year.
"It's not that I'm a denier of the coronavirus or an opponent of vaccination,"

said Kimmich, who based his decision on "personal concerns".

The footballer's stance drew comment from caretaker Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman, Steffen Seibert, who hopes the footballer will inform himself and "let all available information about the vaccines approved in the EU sink in".

Seibert urged Kimmich to get vaccinated because the Bayern star is "someone who is looked up to by millions" as a role model.

Kimmich appears to be in the minority among Germany's top flight footballers.

Christian Seifert, managing director of the German Football League (DFL), has said around 94 per cent of Bundesliga players are vaccinated. Kimmich says he may get vaccinated in the future and team-mate Thomas Mueller hopes it will be sooner rather than later.

"As a friend, it's an absolutely acceptable decision," said Mueller.

"As a teammate, and if you also look a little at what might be better for everyone... my opinion is perhaps that the vaccination would be better."

Chelsea Survive Southampton Shootout

LONDON (Dispatches) - Chelsea needed a penalty shootout for the second consecutive round to reach the quarter-finals of the League Cup as they edged past Southampton, while a much-changed Arsenal beat Leeds 2-0 on Tuesday.

Kepa Arizabalaga was the Chelsea hero as he made a string of late saves to deny Saints a place in the last eight as the game at Stamford Bridge ended 1-1 after 90 minutes.

Both goals came minutes either side of half-time as Kai Havertz headed Chelsea into the lead before Southampton hit back quickly when Che Adams bundled the ball home after Kepa parried Kyle Walker-Peters' shot.

The Spain goalkeeper saved from Will Smallbone, Mohammed Salisu and Lyanco to take the tie to a shootout.

Kepa then denied Theo Walcott from the spot and Smallbone blasted over as Chelsea progressed despite Mason Mount's penalty being saved by Fraser Forster.

Two goals in 14 second-half minutes from Callum Chambers and Eddie Nketiah took Arsenal through at the Emirates.

Mikel Arteta had named a strong side in the previous two rounds with the Gunners not involved in European football for the first time in 25 seasons.

But the Spaniard made nine changes from the side that started Friday's 3-1 win over Aston Villa.



Beijing Games Organizers Say Virus Biggest Challenge

BEIJING (AFP) - Beijing Winter Olympics organizers said Wednesday that protecting the Games from the coronavirus is the "biggest challenge", as China races to stamp out an outbreak 100 days before the event starts.

The Chinese capital will in February become the first host of a Summer and Winter Games, and last week welcomed the Olympic flame with a low-key ceremony.

But with just a few months until it kicks off, China is battling a virus outbreak that has seen millions told to stay at home, mass testing across at least 11 provinces and brought many flights and trains to a standstill.

"The pandemic is the biggest challenge to the organization of the Winter Olympics," Zhang Jiandong, executive vice president of the Beijing Organizing Committee, told a press conference.

China's strict rules "can reduce the risks and impact of Covid-19", he said, adding that those in the Games' strict bubble who do not comply with anti-epidemic measures will face consequences. He did not say what.

Zhang told reporters that "all preparations are complete" and venues finished.

Case numbers remain comparatively low in China -- where the virus emerged towards the end of 2019 -- but authorities have maintained a strict zero-Covid approach through border controls and rigorous local lockdowns.

